

## Lent 6: PALM SUNDAY

Mark 11:1-11 [MW21-11]

Sermon preached by Rev Wayne Thornton, Sunday 28 March 2021

Why do you think the people welcomed Jesus so enthusiastically?

- what do you think the arrival of Jesus in this way meant to them?

While you ponder that, I'm going to read the lyrics to a song by Michael Card

- it's called 'Ride On to Die'

and it perhaps sheds some light on the crowds and the celebration  
then and now [PP Slide]

### ***Ride On To Die***

*Sense the sorrow untold*

*As you look down the road*

*At the clamouring crowd drawing near:*

*Fell the heat of the day,*

*As you look down the way,*

*Hear the shouts of Hosanna the King.*

*Oh, daughter of Zion,*

*Your time's drawing near;*

*Don't forsake him. Oh don't pass it by.*

*On the foal of a donkey*

*As the prophets had said,*

*Passing by you, he rides on to die.*

*Come now, little foal,*

*Though you're not very old,*

*Come and bear your first burden bravely.*

*Walk so softly upon*

*All the coats and the palms,*

*Bear the one on your back, Oh, so gently.*

*Midst the shouting so loud,*

*And the joy of the crowd,*

*There is One who is riding in silence.*

*For he knows the ones here*

*Will be fleeing in fear*

*When their Shepherd is taken away.*

*Oh, daughter of Zion,*

*Your time's drawing near;*

*Don't forsake him. Oh don't pass it by.*

*On the foal of a donkey*

*As the prophets had said,*

*Passing by you, he rides on to die.*

In the midst of this clamouring crowd “There is One who is riding in silence”

- that passing by us, he rides on to die

Today we are remembering what seemed an unplanned spontaneous “happening”

- for us it is very much planned and prepared for

we have special songs and words

we have palm crosses made beforehand

- for us it is a celebration of faith, but then we know the whole story

Back when these events took place, nothing special was planned

- it just happened
  - sparked off when Jesus rode into the holy city on a donkey
- and that crowd welcomed Jesus enthusiastically wildly, excitedly, over the top
- it makes me wonder:
  - what was going on for those people, that they responded to Jesus like this?
- Jesus, arriving as he did, really affected people
  - there was a carnival atmosphere of joy and celebration

And then again, just five days later, those joyful shouts of “Hosanna!”

- had become angry shouts of “Crucify!”
  - the cheering crowd which had welcomed Jesus transformed into a hostile mob who booed and cursed him
- it makes me wonder
  - what was going on for these people that they responded like this?

I invite you to reflect on this as we sing “Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus” [PP Slide]

Perhaps the people who made up that crowd only saw the part they wanted to see

- or perhaps what they did see they reacted against
  - even today with the benefit of 2000 years to think and study and consider more carefully
- there is still much to ponder

Yet we do have an agreed starting point:

- welcoming Jesus as our Saviour
  - walking together, following Jesus on a road both rough and smooth, that leads to a cross
- for to welcome Jesus is to walk the way of the cross

I have more than a sneaking suspicion that part of the reason the “Hosannas!”

- turned to “Crucify!”
  - is because Jesus did not do things the way people thought he should
- he was not the new King of Israel
  - reclaiming the glory days of David and Solomon
- he did not instantly usher in a new era when everything would be made right through his miraculous powers
- he did not fit the religious leaders' criteria for “Messiah” in any way at all

In fact it seems more that Jesus was a miracle

- in a way that people were not even looking for
  - yet still, as he did all those years ago we remember that Jesus enters the town
- our town, and it is just the beginning ...

Today, Palm Sunday, ushers in 'Holy Week'

- as we mark the events of Jesus final days, leading to his arrest, crucifixion and ...
  - here is how one writer, Charles Rice, reflects on Holy Week:

Holy Week got started in Jerusalem as the early Christians became aware of the very places where Jesus walked, taught, suffered, and died. They wanted not so much to reenact as to connect — to enter into — those saving events by standing in the very places and reading the accounts of what happened there. More than remembering, more than reenactment they desired to participate in the saving presence of Christ. One way to achieve this, Christians have thought, is to keep Holy Week, to walk through the story of Jesus' Passion and death.

But what makes us truly rejoice is the knowledge that Jesus enters our town, comes to us in Mangawhai, Kaiwaka, Hakaru / Wellsford and Tomorata / Maungaturoto, Paparoa, Whakapirau ... wherever people with the open hearts of children receive him, he comes. It is a matter not of wishing that we could have "been with him then" but of welcoming him with sincerity and abandon: "Hosanna, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord."

We still forget what he requires of us. It is all too easy to turn this whole day into nothing more than a showy parade, to forget what it means to follow Jesus on this way. The humble beast of burden that carried Jesus into the city can remind us of the lowly service to which we are called. Though we sometimes speak of this as the "triumphal entry," the unfolding events of the week, like the whole of Jesus' life, deliver us from notions of triumphalism.

Though Jesus is betrayed, through him God overcomes sin and death. There lies the importance of keeping Holy Week. Among the early Christians, Easter was celebrated as the "Great Three Days." Those early followers of Jesus did not separate the events of this week; they were all of a piece, beginning on this day filled with expectation and uncertainty. Jesus came to a town we recognize and to people we know all too well. But among them, and in spite of them, he walks toward the salvation that comes at Easter.

Today perhaps the real danger is not that people will see only the "froth and bubble"

- of waving palms and cheering crowds  
and miss the reality of new life on Easter Day
- the real danger is that people will not see Jesus at all  
that though we welcome him here, within the walls of our church  
welcome him into our lives
- out there, people just won't see Jesus ...

Unless we make a fuss

- unless we notice him and point him out  
not just with words but with our actions  
by our very lives
- so today we have palms, for the joyous celebration  
and a cross, for the sin which Jesus overcame to give us life
- today we have both palms and the cross  
our mission is to make sure Jesus does not pass by in silence
- our mission is to help people notice  
to step out of the crowd and see Jesus for themselves

As we enter Holy Week, walking again the way that leads to Good Friday and Easter

- a concluding poem titled "Coronation March" [PP SLIDE]

Listen!  
I hear a distant crowd  
shouting.  
What is it  
they are saying?  
I can't quite make it out  
over the clop, clop  
of donkey hooves on cobblestones.  
Ah, there it is,  
"Hosanna!"

Listen!  
I hear a distant crowd  
shouting.  
What is it they are screaming?  
I can't quite make it out  
over the clop, clop  
of hammer blows driving in the nails.  
Ah, there it is,  
"Crucify him!"

Listen!  
A crowd goes by once more  
in endless procession,  
and you and I are in the midst.  
And the world wonders,  
unable to hear our words.  
They watch our acts and wonder  
will it be a cross or a coronation. (Robin E. Van Cleef)

[Pause]

So now we will bless and distribute our Palm Crosses  
- then I will invite you to hold your cross and reflect  
as I read Philippians 2:5-11 from The Message  
[PP Slide]